MARXISM and the INTELLECTUALS

By J. R. Johnson

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The working class and socialism in a review of two books by British socialist Raymond Williams.

Plus documentary material on the destruction of a workers paper in the U. S.

Facing Reality Publishing Committee

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An Introductory Statement

The first part of this pamphlet consists of two articles, "Marxism and the Intellectuals," by J. R. Johnson which were denied publication in the newspaper, CORRESPONDENCE. The articles are a review of two books by Raymond Williams, a leading British left socialist, and deal with the most fundamental problem facing the socialist movement—the working class and its place in the struggle for socialism. The fact that these articles were excluded from CORRESPONDENCE has its particular irony. That they are a significant contribution to modern socialist thought, the reader can judge for himself. What must be noted, however, is that the author of these articles was the founder of the group which later developed into the Correspondence Editing Committees and the originator of the theories on which the newspaper was based.

CORRESPONDENCE was published by an organization of Editing Committees which had its beginnings in 1941. At that time a group of people, workers and intellectuals, saw the need to break away from the sterile theorizing and bureaucratic conceptions of leadership of the traditional Marxist organizations and to apply Marxism to the living realities of our time. Most of us were in the Trotskyist movement. Patiently and carefully we devoted ten years to the study of Marxism in all its aspects, to the study of the working class, particularly in the United States and Russia, and to the study of the specific stage which capitalism had reached on a world-wide scale.

During these years we published a series of articles and pamphlets on a whole range of subjects to prepare ourselves and our friends for the tasks before us. Two in particular stand out: **The American Worker**, the first statement by a worker of the concrete life of the worker in the crucial arena of production in the United States combined with a philosophical analysis of the modern American working class; and **State Capitalism and World Revolution**, a theoretical analysis from a Marxist point of view of the stage of state capitalism in its two leading forms, Russian totalitarianism and the American welfare state.

In 1951 we felt ourselves equipped to go directly to the American working class and the American public and we formed an independent organization with the purpose of publishing a newspaper, CORRESPONDENCE. It was to be a working class paper (not a theoretical journal) based on the conception that the decisive force for a new society, for socialism, was the working class, its thoughts and its activity. It was to combine the talents of workers and intellectuals to produce a paper that was to be a weapon that workers could use in the class struggle but that would concern it-

self with the struggle for the new society in all its aspects and in every section of society—among Negroes, among women, among youth, among intellectuals, as well as among workers. It would reject the conception of an elite, a vanguard party, to lead the workers. As we later stated our purpose in the book, **Facing Reality**, it was "to recognize that the new society exists and to record the facts of its existence." We rejected not only bureaucrats but the bureaucratic organizations, such as unions and parties, which act as the main barrier to the realization of the new society.

CORRESPONDENCE began publication in 1953 and our first years were spent in the dark period of McCarthyism. In 1956 the Hungarian working class revolution not only confirmed and extended our views, both theoretically and practically, but opened up a whole new era of revolutionary transformations—in Africa, in Asia, in Latin American, in Europe and in the United States—bringing new nations and classes into the struggle for the new society.

Possibilities and Dangers

The tremendous possibilities, for the world and for us, opened up by these revolutionary developments, however, contained their temptations and their dangers. It has been a long experience of the Marxist movement that periods of revolutionary rise, as well as periods of revolutionary decline, give rise to impatience and dissatisfaction with what workers are doing or are not doing. The radical verbiage of middle class intellectuals expressing their dissatisfactions with capitalist society seems to provide an easy short cut to success which avoids the painstaking work and study of maintaining the closest ties, in theory and in practice, with the workers. Both intellectuals and certain types of workers, accustomed to leadership in the trade union movement, succumb to these temptations. They substitute a new conception of an elite, convincing themselves that they embody the new society, for the rigorous theoretical discipline of Marxism which seeks the new society in the activity of rank and file workers and ordinary people of all classes. We presented a study of just such a case in our pamphlet, **Wildcat Strikes and the Left Wing Committeemen.**

It was this development which took place in the Correspondence Editing Committees. In the summer and fall of 1961 the editor, Grace Lee, and chairman of the editorial board, James Boggs, worked out a whole new set of theories in order to reject Marxism as a guide for the organization. These theories had already begun to find their way into the paper earlier. They embraced the idea that the workers were backward. In spite of our participation in the workers' movement, they confused the activities and desires of rank and file workers with the limitations and deficiences of the organized union movement and union activities. They substituted for the concept of class the middle class abstractions of "rights" and "morals." They rejected the Marxist conception of the inevita-

bility of socialism. They adopted the view that a new elite was needed to lead and educate the people to socialism. They adopted the idea of American exceptionalism in the mistaken belief that the U. S. was somehow immune to the laws and crises of capitalism because of its relative affluence. In short, without ever once admitting it openly, they abandoned Marxism and substituted for it a Utopian, bureaucratic socialism.

The consequences in organizational practice for those who make such a theoretical break were inevitable. They did not see fit to discuss their new policies with the organization—they merely introduced them into the paper. They were called to order on this in the organization. The third part of this pamphlet consists of extracts from letters that were part of the discussion in the Editing Committees. In these letters by Martin Glaberman and Frank are analyzed the concrete articles in the paper which indicated the growing rejection of both Marxism and the working class and the high-handed organizational procedure.

They retreated in words but not in fact. The editor and chairman refused to print the articles, "Marxism and the Intellectuals," although they were based upon and extended the ideas held by the organization. In reply to this action, J. R. Johnson presented a statement to the Editorial Board which attacked both the actions and the theory on which they were based and reaffirmed the most fundamental tenet of the organization: the revolutionary capacity of the working class. This statement appears as the second part of this pamphlet.

When the majority of the organization voted to print the articles, the editor and chairman chose to split the organization. With them went Lyman Paine, a member who was legally the owner of CORRESPONDENCE. Despite the fact that responsibility for editing, financing and circulating the paper had always rested with the membership, they decided to use the legal technicality of ownership to take the paper away from the majority of the membership so that CORRESPONDENCE no longer represented either the organization or the policies on which it had always been based. Although they speak glibly of morality and human relations, they have not yet seen fit to put in their paper for their readers' information any news of their split.

We present this material to make known to the readers of CORRESPONDENCE and those who are interested why, politically and organizationally, a workers paper was destroyed. But its value goes beyond the particular dispute from which it arose. The workers paper which will have to appear in the United States must start with the political and journalistic conceptions contained in this pamphlet. It is both a report on a past experience and a basis for a new beginning.

Martin Glaberman

Marxism and the Intellectuals

A review of Raymond Williams' CULTURE AND SOCIETY and THE LONG REVOLUTION

I. The Creative Power of the Working Class

Honor to whom honor is due. There is a campaign on by the capitalist class in all the advanced countries to prove that capitalism is so affluent, that is to say, so prosperous, that workers everywhere are becoming middle class. The rulers of society want to imply that not only has capitalism solved what Marxists say it cannot solve, its economic difficulties, but they want to throw water on the idea that socialism is an inherent need for working people. Where, as in England, there is a powerful Labor Party, they want to encourage voters to vote middle class, i.e., to abandon the idea that as workers they have their special political interests. By the same means they want to encourage voters everywhere to vote for reactionary parties. Raymond Williams, the English socialist writer, has given that bold example of capitalist lying propaganda a knock-out blow which I gladly reproduce. This is what he says:—

Before World War II the condition of the working class in England was a world-wide scandal. Poverty, unemployment, social degradation in many "depressed areas" seemed permanent. Undoubtedly the Labor victory in 1945 improved working class conditions of life. What is called "prosperity" is that the worst of the shocking conditions have been eliminated. The Conservatives accepted the change and promised, if they got back to power, not to go back to the old days. They have got back to power since 1951. They spend a vast amount of their resources and energy seeking to convince ordinary people that, owing to this new prosperity, labor must now desert the very idea of labor politics.

Mr. Williams gives some figures. In 1924 the Labor vote was 5½ million. In 1929, it was 8½ million; in 1935 it was 8½ million. To win the victory in 1945 Labor polled 12 million votes. But in 1950, the Labor poll was 13,235,610; in 1951, although Labor lost the election, it was 13,949,105. In 1955, when it lost again, in a poll which was generally low, the Labor vote was still high: 12,405,246. The Conservatives said the low poll was due, among other things, to bad weather. In 1959, after years of what the Conservatives call prosperity, the weather was perfect. The general poll was still low. but Labor polled 12,216,166. Mr. Williams sums up:— in the days when capitalism was at its worst, the Labor vote was never more than 38% of the total votes. Despite the yelling of the capitalists about the prosperity which is making workers into middle class voters, the Labor vote during this prosperity has never been less than 43%. "These facts," concludes Mr. Williams, "reduce the usual analysis to nonsense." New houses and washing machines do not

make the Labor voter a Conservative voter. It should be noted that not only the Conservatives make this nonsensical argument. Many labor leaders wish to remove socialism altogether from the Labor program. This prosperity, they say, is making the workers middle class. Mr. Williams sums up the essence of the argument well: it is whether a washing machine, and even at times a small car, destroys, alters or effectively changes the consciousness of the worker which is created in the labor process. That is exactly it. Mr. Williams hints at but does not develop the facts about the poverty and low standard of living which still remain: even in a long book a writer cannot develop everything.

Now who is Raymond Williams and, apart from the facts, why is what he says of interest and concern to socialists everywhere? Mr. Williams is the most remarkable writer that the socialist movement in England has produced for ten years or perhaps twenty. And that places him automatically at the head of all English writers on social subjects. He is also a man of character and will. In the tumultuous thirties, many British intellectuals went chasing after Stalinism. The Left Socialists and even the Marxist writers produced a crude theory of what they called class struggle which ended by leaving the ideas of the whole movement in discredit and disorder. Many dropped away because, soaked in Stalinism during the pro-Russian years of the war, and then demoralized by the cold war and the Khrushchev repudiation of Stalinism, they went back to the Labor Party. Socialist theory sank to the lowest stage for generations.

A Genuine Socialist

Ten years ago Mr. Williams, of working class origin but with a university education, made up his mind to correct this state of affairs. Now after ten years his work is recognized for what it has done and is doing. He has shown the origins of British socialism in the history of Britain itself. He has concentrated on the manner in which British writers and the British workers have created what exists in Britain today. He has developed the idea of culture from an exclusive possession of the educated and intellectuals and shown that the only meaning the word has for today is **a total way of life of the whole people.** He has exposed the pretences of capitalist society and its tricks. He is a g e n u i n e socialist in that he recognizes that today the only way to a fully civilized society for all is the raising of the working class to a dominant position in society. For learning, hard labor, insight and devotion to the working class, his work and the support and controversy it has stimulated, is the biggest event in British socialist thought today. His work can be heartily recommended not only for the position it has won but for its own sake.

But precisely because of its virtues and the impression it is making, even while we bring the books to the attention of our readers (a thing we rarely do), Marxists have to show large and grave gaps in Mr. Williams' work, and in his thinking.

Not only is Mr. Williams not a Marxist. In the chapter he devotes to Marxism, he does not seem to be aware of what Marxism is. And too many devoted contemporary Marxists either do not know or ignore Marx's preoccupation with historical research and with the labor process, with production. Without a grasp of Marx's use of history and the role of production, you will not understand the significance he attaches to those concepts so often used and so often abused — the concepts of class and of revolution.

Despite the title of his second book, Mr. Williams ignores the idea of the revolution completely. In fact he obviously knows so little about it that I have to go into some detail about, not what Marx says, which Mr. Williams has no doubt read, but what it means for us today, not for students but for everyone who is not a conscious anti-Marxist. Marx believed that the revolution was inevitable and necessary above all from his historical studies. If even it was part of his adaptation of the Hegelian Logic, his approach was based on history. In his last years he reduced the whole to a simple formula. There had always been mass revolution against exploitation and the evils of a decaying society. Capitalist society could not escape this fate. The difference now was that the makers of the revolution were objectively prepared by capitalism itself to do what previous revolutions had been unable to do, establish a just and harmonious society.

A Glaring Defect

Many honest socialists believe that the revolution is a wish, and an illusion or at best a regrettable necessity. That it is and has been an integral part of social development is so insignificant a part of Mr. Williams' equipment that he does not even argue against it. The neglect of this in his thinking is the most lamentable and glaring defect in his work. He simply does not know what the working class really is and what are its potentialities. He talks a great deal about the workers, or the working class, but he has never seriously examined the concept of class, in history and in social development. Let me give a brief historical summary of where it stands today for me, a Marxist.

In the English Revolution, the petty-bourgeois farmers and the workers and petty-bourgeois of the London area carried the revolution to a brilliant success. Without them Cromwell would have been nothing. Suddenly in 1646 Lilburne, his colleagues and his followers in their struggle against Cromwell, hitherto their leader, laid down imperishably the political premises of the individualist revolt against semi-feudal society. It came like a bolt from the blue. Why and how? The answer is crucial. Freed from the mental domination of both the Royalist enemy and their own Presbyterian leaders, they discovered their own ideas of what political and religious freedom should consist of. They discovered the political premises and perspectives of their own class. Against their limitations is to be set the fact that it has taken three centuries for society to approach, not to accomplish, what they discovered. It is only within recent years

that the enduring splendor of their thought has been discovered and made public.

The whole significance of revolution and the class are here established. It was not only their fight against the King, but their sudden discovery of the difference between them and Cromwell that forced them to think for themselves, to draw the lessons of their own independent class experience, fully and completely, because they had to do it in opposition to all other classes. I am convinced that they could do this only because the revolution gave them the opportunity, forced them to think independently.

Our Use of History

History and our use of history move. In the French Revolution we see a further stage. What for us today should be key movements of the French Revolution is not the work of Babeuf, traditionally the first socialist. Babeuf is part of our tradition, all of us begin with him. **For us today**, the key events of the French Revolution should be two. After the overthrow of the King, power in Paris passed from the bourgeois National Assembly to the petty-bourgeois Commune of Paris, backed by the petty-bourgeois and the neo-proletarians of Paris. After the September Massacre the Commune of Paris sent a circular letter to the other cities of France asking them to join with the Commune against the counter-revolution. They aimed at a nationwide movement against the bourgeois National Assembly. The other Communes did not accept the invitation. What would have happened if they had I do not know. But this much is certain, that for a time at least France would have been governed by a combination of the petty-bourgeois and the masses of the towns, supported by the peasantry. The socialist revolution on a national scale was very near. They would have at least produced profound conceptions of socialist beginnings.

The second incident was the revolt organized at Eveche by the proletarians against the Assembly **and now against the Commune.** Robespierre, in mortal terror that this extreme revolutionarism of Paris would split France irrevocably into two, managed to direct this revolutionary force into the demonstrations of the days of May. Robespierre, if not right, seems to have been justified in his fears, and much of the anti-proletarian evil attributed to him (the psychologists have a wonderful time here) springs from this justified concern.

But what we have to notice is that the class, forced back on its own resources, at once develops an audacity and profundity which is beyond empirical expectation. For brief periods it was able, was forced to think its own thoughts. Without them, the French Revolution would have been defeated. Marx learned much from the French Revolution, limited as was the material in his time. Today we have many more proved facts than even Lenin had.

Mr. Williams is fascinated by the slow persistence and steadiness of the British working class. That has been wholly admirable, but that does not exhaust history. And it does not exhaust the history of the British working class. Production links it to all other workers.

In Russia in 1905 the Russian workers formed the Soviet and carried it to a triumphant climax in 1917. They rejected parliamentary democracy and created a new political form, they created a political democracy suited to themselves. They failed against Stalinism for the same reason that Lilburne and the Levellers failed—they were too small a section of the population. It was the Hungarian Revolution which carried the Russian experiment to its conclusion—the Councils of Workers in the factories formed the only government that there was for a few days. They carried the historical development of the working class further. While the Soviet was mainly a political body, the Hungarian Workers Councils were both economic and political. I repeat. What happens in a revolution is that the class for the first time finds itself free to think its own thoughts and give some concrete form to its own experience accumulated over the generations. Whenever a revolutionary class moves, it establishes a stage for the international movement. I cannot believe that Mr. Williams does not know this, or at least is not aware that this is Marxism. When Marxists talk about class they have in mind the history of civilization. The Soviet originated in the proletarian experience of production — a world wide experience.

Spontaneous Creativity

It is the absence of any conception of the spontaneous creativity of the working class (and all other progressive classes) that makes me view much of what Mr. Williams projects into the future with scepticism and more. The British working class has not said its last word on socialism. From my point of view it has not said its first. Some intellectuals and union leaders speak for it and it adapts itself to these pronouncements chiefly as a means of struggle against capitalism knowing that capitalism is in command. The general history of the Labor Party is one of adaptation to capitalism and this is because the working class as a whole accepts the policy of adaptation and does its best within that policy. Revolutionary activity, revolutionary politics, creativity on a genuinely comprehensive and revolutionary scale, that occurs very rarely in the history of a class. (Often, as in the French Revolution, the effect is immediately and powerfully felt in other countries.) That intellectuals and union leaders and political leaders have assisted the bourgeoisie in suppressing the independent activity and thought of the class is undoubtedly true. But fundamentally they have been able to do this because the class as a whole or a decisive section of it has not felt that the moment has come when at all costs they have to break out of the capitalist chains.

But Mr. Williams can say with some justification: if the class has not made the decisive step, has not faced the necessity of thinking its own thoughts and working out its own actions, what do you expect me to do? Here we come face to face with another fundamental of Marxism, the inevitability of socialism. It is possible that Mr. Williams believes this to be Marxist jargon, or a phrase to keep up the spirits of devoted fanatics. It is in reality the key

to any serious Marxist political analysis of socialism. Marx did not use it as an incitement. It can be said that philosophically he never accepted it as truth, as absolute truth. Over and over again he carefully said: socialism or barbarism. That is to say, either the working class establishes the socialist society or the contradictions of capitalism will lead society to barbarism. The precise meaning of barbarism is a matter for debate, for those who wish to. For my part, not only were Fascism and Stalinism barbarisms (literally), but the ultimate in human barbarism has been reached when the most powerful statesmen of today organize their societies with the physical destruction of total societies as their main object. This is due to the necessity of preserving what they very rightly call **their** way of life. Marx's inevitability of socialism was a philosophical, a theoretical postulate, a necessity of thought, based on his conviction that capitalism would inevitably end as it is ending. With this postulate you approach every political, every social, every economic problem or set of circumstances; you look for those forces, movements, objective or subjective, which advance the cause of socialism and hasten the destruction of capitalism. Unless this is the basis of your approach, Marxism is nonsense. Or is what its opponents call it, an evil force of disorder and destruction based upon the stimulation and organization of the worst elements in human nature and social life. Anything like this is completely foreign to Mr. Williams.

Marx devoted the main effort of his working life to demonstrating in economic terms the inevitability of the degeneration of capitalism. That is what **Capital** is about. Today we know that Marx never placed the inevitability of its collapse upon the growth of the productive forces and the concomitant decline of the market, and it is extraordinary to contemplate the distinguished Marxists who have poured forth their cataracts of ink on this barren soil. To put it briefly: all Marx's economics ended in ever-increasing proofs of the insoluble conflict capitalism inevitably developed between its mechanical and objective progress, the diminishing number of magnates who benefited by this progress; and the growing size, objective organization, misery and revolt of the workers. Mr. Williams prefers to see socialism, if any process of development can be discerned in his empiricism, he prefers to see socialist history as events that happened. They just happened. How, and more important, why, he does not seem to know, or even to be interested in. But this means that how or why future events may happen he does not, he cannot know. Things have reached where they are and observing things he thinks that socialism is the only answer. His basis seems to be the semi-religious "brotherhood of man." Marx understood the origin and importance of ideas. The great historical materialist also understood their limitations. And Marxists today have seen ideas so degraded that one of their many concerns is to maintain them in their essential integrity. Lenin here is a model. No man has added so much that is new to Marxism. None was always so vigilant in maintaining the integrity of Marx's basic ideas.

What then have we to be on guard against in reading Mr. Williams? That, mainly, is the purpose of this article.

He examines and analyses with great insight and power where the British workers have reached today and where he estimates that they are going tomorrow. But he omits entirely the main lesson of history, the creative power of a class both in theory and action, when it is thrown on its own resources and is compelled to think and act for itself. I see no sign that he is at all aware of this. He is also unaware of the international significance of any great revolutionary working class action, a significance due to the universality of production.

The historical origin of his method (or lack of method) is obvious. The British socialist workers have not created any great revolutionary actions that have become an integral part of British and world history, as the French and Russians have done. Because many, Stalinists mainly, have attempted to base British revolutionism on a foreign, chiefly the Russian, example, Mr. Williams has turned his back on that and based his devoted and profound work on the purely British experience. But he has fallen into another pit; he has based British socialism and its future purely on the British experience. Hence his great omissions of what the British working class has before it, being part, an integral part, of an international way of life.

Dominated by Ideas

There is here also, despite his undoubted devotion to the working class, the typical attitude of the non-Marxist intellectual. Ideas and the development of ideas dominate him. I view this with more than caution. For history shows that when the revolutionary class expresses itself as it usually does, in action and with ideas based on action, the intellectuals who have been advocating the importance of the class, as a rule bitterly oppose this new and unexpected expression of the very class they have supported. That is the lesson of history. The intellectuals are unable to understand this sudden outburst of independent ideas and independent action. The only safe way out is the Marxist preoccupation with theory, with history, and with socialism as an international movement. Writing about socialism in Britain, Mr. Williams does not mention the Hungarian Revolution once. But there is an even greater omission. He makes no reference to the American working class. I shall show next, that (with the possible exception of the Russian) it is from the American working class that we can as Marxists expect the greatest advance in socialist action and socialist ideas. When exactly this will come I do not know and have only contempt for the time servers who want me to tell them the date. But I hope that here I shall demonstrate to Mr. Williams the validity and indeed the necessity of Marxism. I have to show, and I will, that Marxism and its expectation of the independent and creative action of the working class is not mere wishing or speculation or psychology but a scientific process. Without this scientific process you either ignore the American workers or indulge in wild and essentially subjective speculations.

II. The American Working Class

1. The Reorganization of Work

First of all, before dealing with the American workers, I have to deal with what makes any human being into the social category we call a worker. What does so is work itself, the labor process. I said in my first article on the books of Raymond Williams that with the possible exception of the Russian, it is from the American working class that we must next expect big advances in socialist action and socialist theory about work.

In this article (and in the previous one) I speak often about "revolutionary" actions by workers. They are a commonplace of history. I believe that only the State Department could see in this analysis an incitement to what it calls subversive activity. **Correspondence**, I am glad to note, does not advocate "the revolution." As a rule, small papers which do that, usually make themselves ridiculous, and ineffective for what they can really do. No revolution in the world can be made or stimulated by a small newspaper. A small paper which advocates "the revolution" is usually viewed with scepticism if not amusement by workers. But any working class paper has not only the right but the duty to analyze Marxism seriously.

First, what do I mean by an advance in socialist theory? I mean primarily the reorganization of work, the reorganization of the labor process. The Russian experience has proved that nationalization of private property can result in greater slavery for the workers. How can workers reorganize their daily work in such a manner as to make it human, that is to say, a socialist procedure? That, today, 1961, is what socialism means. It plays a very small part in Mr. Williams' two books. It plays so small a part in socialist theory as a whole that I have to spend some time on it.

Reorganization of labor is the obvious next stage of socialist progress. I am so positive about this because the whole world today accepts the fact that the nationalization of the essential means of production will follow automatically upon the overthrow or decisive defeat of capitalism. There are debates and necessary debates about the exact methods of planning. These will always be necessary. But it is today understood, even by the capitalists themselves, that the best way to develop the economy is to bring the whole under some central direction. To use a famous phrase of Marx, this belief has now gone far beyond the fixity of a popular prejudice. What every government had to do in World War II, as well as the Russian successes, brought home this truth to general consciousness. The capitalists pay lip service to what they call private enterprise, by which they strive desperately to maintain their privileged position, but they too watch the economy as a whole and seek to fit their profits and privileges into some general plan. The leaders of any capitalist section of industry would not dream of carrying on without some sort of plan, only this plan is not for social welfare but for profits and to prevent losses. A genuine soci-

alist government anywhere will not argue about the necessity of viewing the economy as a whole and planning it in the public interests. So, stage by stage, the socialist society establishes its premises in the consciousness of the world at large.

What is troubling the international working class is this. In that nationalization, that so-called socialization, where and how is the situation of the workers in the labor process organically improved? An assembly line in Moscow is an assembly line in Detroit. The Russian experience is a terrible barrier to progress. The Russians have nationalized, collectivized, and they plan. The result is the greatest tyranny known to history. But that is not the main obstacle in the development of socialist consciousness. Nowhere has the working class or its supporters worked out, in life or in theory, any procedure where the labor process can be altered in such a manner that the workers will feel that the old capitalist slavery has been left behind for something new, for socialism, a new society.

That is the problem. And though everybody knows it, few talk about it.

We have here to go back to what socialism is and what it is not. When Marx was laying the foundations of his theory over a hundred years ago, he and Engels did a profound analysis of work. His analysis has never been approached, far less surpassed or even developed. We know part of it popularly today as the alienation of labor. Marx's great point was that capitalist production of its very nature destroyed the human capacities and potentialities of the worker. One sharp basis of his conception of a new society was that work, the capacity to plan and work to a plan, was what distinguished human beings from animals. But under the domination of capital, man was made to labor as an animal. The necessity and possible benefits of this type of labor were the means of eating well and sleeping comfortably with his wife. Thus, says Marx, capitalist production made his specifically human qualities of being able to think and plan his work into an animalistic quality, and elevated to a special importance the characteristics he shared with animals.

"Be His Payment High or Low"

"Be his payment high or low" is one of the greatest phrases of Marx about the degradation of the worker under capitalist production. A socialist society does not have as its first aim giving workers higher pay. It does not primarily aim at making the working day six hours or four hours, or giving the worker six weeks paid holidays instead of two. The American worker has the highest standard of living in the world. This has not made him into a lover of capitalism. What Marxism aims at is not merely a decent living wage for all. It seeks above all to get rid of the wearisome, dull, grinding labor day after day, year after year, crushing the human personality, with no prospect of developing the human interests, needs and capacities of man as a human being with aspirations to live and develop a fully human life.

The problem, and it is the last and final problem, is how to do

that. Marx's theory was based upon a very profound and elevated conception (with its foundations in the history of human society) of the development of man. He took the necessity of this development for granted. Man's part of this inevitable development was that he himself had to work out the adaptation of his discoveries in science and engineering into a truly human development of human personality at work. History moves and man's conditions of work change. Marx for the most part could concentrate only on the negative aspects inherent in capitalist production. In as much as the change would have to be the work of workers themselves, it is not surprising that it is only the negative development of Marx's analysis which has been briefly expanded, by intellectuals. Some Marxists say today that all this talk about leisure and the vast sums and energy spent upon amusement is nothing more than a part of the capitalist degradation. A worker today is so trained and limited, wearied and stunted in his development by the capitalist productive system that all he can think of when he leaves work is amusement, relaxation by superficial and idiotic newspapers; silly films; routine comic strips; books about the most sensual love, i.e., the animal aspects of love; murder, either plain or disguised as adventure; commonplace songs; by all of which the capitalists not only make profit, but further deaden and reduce the worker's capacity for human life. Now and then a man of genius and a few men of talent can stamp this collection of nonsense with some artistic creativity, but the aim of it all is to maintain the consciousness of the great majority at the lowest possible level, corresponding to the stultification in the labor process. To such a pitch has this wholesale degradation of human life been carried that to fight consistently against it would demand an effort beyond the powers of the ordinary man. He simply accepts it and the capitalists either tell him that this is life (the more the better) or, when challenged, say that this is all the majority of men are fit for.

The families of capitalists, sections of the middle class, all those who can live a more human life, can produce for themselves or at least support a few high-class newspapers, special music, special literature and other ways of employing their leisure time and developing themselves. But an artist, a professional man like an architect or an engineer, is interested in his work as work; he often spends his leisure time on his work; he does not believe nor do others believe that his sole purpose in life is to do four hours work a day instead of six, or to get so much more per hour. If he has a really good job, he doesn't want to do as little of it as possible, for more money. That is the mentality that is carefully inculcated into the worker from his earliest school days (education), his whole life is shaped according to these principles, the amusement and relaxation the capitalists give him are aimed to strengthen this view of life.

Periodically, however, the workers break out. But only to fall back into it. For it will last as long as capitalism lasts. That is the nature of the beast.

Not that workers have not tried organizational ways out. In

England at the end of the first war a section of the working class made a great attempt to establish workers' control of production. They failed, and the whole thing seems to be buried beneath later events. Today workers are more rebellious than ever but they seem limited to fighting the capitalists at the drop of a hat for all sorts of grievances. Sometimes it seems to the capitalist that they fight him for fighting's sake. Not only the capitalists themselves but labor leaders and sympathetic journalists are unable to find any reasons for this apparently purposeless and erratic behavior. They are unable to understand that a ferocious struggle, for ten cents an hour, or against some grievance can only be understood as a periodical revolt against the very conditions of labor and expresses the sullen anger of workers at this degradation and their apparent helplessness before it. But until labor solves this problem, it cannot today think with hope, with confidence, about socialism as a new society. Workers know that nationalization, collectivization, planning, if these are done by their masters, can easily result in greater stultification for them.

Now that is how, as a Marxist, I see capitalist society and the working class. Why do I think that it is in America that the working class will make the first break-through?

2. The Beginning of the CIO

Lenin is a useful guide. He always worked on the following principle. In estimating and planning for the future revolutionary activities of a working class he taught that you should always begin, **begin**, with the highest point reached by the workers in their previous struggles.

What is the highest point of the American working class, where must we **begin?** There is no doubt about this among Marxists. It was the movement, the type of struggles, which established the CIO in 1935-37. And it is evidence of the general backwardness of American social thought that this great movement is not firmly established as a part of American history and American consciousness.

The corresponding movement in England, the strike of the dock workers and match girls in 1889, though not anything near the range and power of the CIO movement, is an established part of the history of the British people, not only of the working class. But of all socialist-minded intellectuals (on whom development of the ideas of socialism mainly falls) the American intellectuals, for reasons which will appear, are the most backward.

On the surface the actions of 1935-37 merely established a new stage of unionism. The real truth is that we have no record of any working class which, apart from an actual revolution, took such grandiose steps to achieve its unionist aims. I can here mention only a few. First the American workers established the sit-in strikes: in other words they attacked capitalism at its root — the process of production itself. The fact, the actual fact, is that they seized capitalist property by force. Secondly, they opened their gates to Negroes, since the Civil War the biggest action on this running

sore of American society. Thirdly, in general they acted in a manner that showed the revolutionary fervor that was moving in them. In dozens of thousands they did not wait to be told or urged. Many are the authentic episodes told of a worker rushing into one of the few groups of accepted organizers and saying, "We have shut down our plant. We have called a meeting to be organized. What do we do next?" The specific American readiness for action without theory is here seen at its best.

But perhaps the most significant and enduring memory of the formation of the CIO was the treasured possession of a worker in Flint many years after—he probably still has it. It was the first contract between the workers and capitalists of a big automobile plant. It consisted of only one typewritten page (full of creases from being constantly folded, opened and refolded). But by this contract, if the workers had a grievance, all workers in the department stopped work and went to discuss the matter with the superintendent. After discussion the decision was made on the spot.

This was not socialism or anything like socialism. Socialism is the organization of production by people who work and are in charge of work. Socialism is not a continual fighting with the boss. But at any rate in those days the workers established their right and their wish to be something else besides a mere category of production like rubber or steel.

We must not lose sight of the vast changes in all aspects of social life which workers' mastery of production must inevitably bring. How far the workers' command of production could go was hinted at by Marx in **Capital**, Volume I, and it should first be noted that Marx was very rough, on Marxists even, who asked him what the workers should do "after the revolution." His answer was a warning to those learned idiots who read his books and then triumphantly announce, "Look. Things have not worked out as he said. Marx was wrong." History is constantly moving on, especially production. Marx was very conscious of this and to enquiries about what the workers would do "after the revolution," Marx replied: they will do what they see it is necessary for them to do; do not ask me for any recipes for the cook shops of the future. Yet, tracing the lessons of history, and not indulging in psychological guesses about socialist workers, he hinted at what would happen to that great social organization, the family, in the socialist future. The children would be educated in the labor process and the family would enter into a new stage of social development.

This is worth some space even in a necessarily brief survey as this. Most of the shallow profundities about the crisis in the modern family and about education are not worth even the time that it takes to read the titles. Nearly all of them accept capitalism as an eternal system. Hence the mess they are always in.

What Marx foresaw was that when workers were in full control of the labor process they would alter their family lives and their work to suit. If the labor process, work, were universally recognized as the first foundation of society and of man as a human

being, then the education of children must begin in the labor process. This in principle is not as new and as revolutionary as it sounds. When, during the Middle Ages, the Catholic view of society and of man prevailed, everybody was educated in the fundamentals and practice of Catholicism from birth till death. In our day it is the labor process, work, the specific quality which distinguishes man from the animals, which will give to the world, not only to a nation, a common view of life and society. Dentists, artists, doctors, engineers, accountants, professors of languages, all will in time do their special studies. But all will begin with and share a common basis of thought. The special students of education, of psychology, will have a common basis for their researches into education. Not only will the family benefit by beginning life together. Side by side with the few specially planned and educative hours the children will do, our modern consciousness of a need to find useful work suitable to the aged will find its satisfaction. Workers will handle this automatically.

I have gone in some detail into the general outlines of this to make clear what socialism is and what workers are and what they are not. Workers do not write books on education, they do not read them. They will not as socialists become specialists on education. But the Marxist bases his view of the future of society upon workers' independent action, because such action will alter the material circumstances of life and the family to such a degree that theories of education and of family life and the labor process itself will assume a new common purpose and possibly within which human thought will venture into new spheres and possibilities, working them out by trial and error as men have always done.

Now what is actually happening in America today in the labor process? Short-sighted and ignorant intellectuals babble about high wages, unemployment pay, pensions and greater and more diversified leisure and means of communication. A few even pontificate on work, but they cannot see that this is a problem which only workers themselves can settle. It is a practical problem for practical people, who are not given to writing books. Intellectuals either know nothing about it or are afraid of it. The plain truth is as all workers (and readers of **Correspondence**) know, the workers in Detroit for example are today worse off than they were in the years of 1935-37. The union leaders have year by year sold out the workers' hard-won privileges; after 25 years the workers know that they have lost the power even of fighting in the 1935-37 manner. They do not know what to do. It isn't the contract, now of many pages, that inhibits them. Workers can throw that aside in one day. It is that they have had an experience they all know or their parents know. American workers have the national impatience with what has been proved unworkable. They will not go through that same procedure again. This is not pure speculation. They have defied Reuther and his benefits by raising the question of "local grievances" on a national scale. They have got no place. They now know that this is a far bigger question than they thought. What

to do? What to do? To a Marxist the evidence is thick that they are today reviewing the whole problem. A Marxist bases himself on the fact that they will be forced to do something, and, not being theoreticians, they will, when acting, start from the highest point where they had reached before and which had failed. This Marxists base on the most thorough and continuing study of international labor that has ever been made.

3. The Working Class and the Nation

This is the strictly economic view of the question. Mr. Williams' analysis shows him to be totally unaware of this problem even in its strictly economic context. But despite the primacy that Marxists give to economic analysis, we, above all, are aware that each working class is part of a distinctive nation, and that its economic actions are governed not only by the complexity and catastrophes of the historical present but by the historical past not only of the working class but of the nation. American Marxists seem singularly deficient in the historical appreciation of the American working class. When you compare the historical development of the American nation with that of the European nations — and you must compare with somebody — certain facts stand out. One certain fact. It is this: the American bourgeoisie has never been seriously challenged for the leadership of the nation. In the three great crises of American history, the War of Independence, the Civil War and the Depression, the bourgeoisie was able either to maintain unchallenged its official control of the state, or, in 1776, to form a state and an army to carry out its war. All the objective causes that can be given for this are subordinate to the fact itself. And one continuing cause and effect is that the American bourgeoisie has been able to establish itself abroad and at home, in the national consciousness, as the originator and guardian of individual liberty, freedom and equality. Marxists are inclined to forget that in social life and conduct these ideas are more firmly established in the United States than elsewhere. The American bourgeoisie did establish something new in the world. All this inhibits the working class in independent class action and independent class thinking.

But the hour approaches. That historical bourgeois domination of American society is running very thin. First there is the cold war. America is as busy risking the lives of Americans and of humanity as a whole as Russia is. The American bourgeoisie has accepted that the Negro question is a national scandal and a national weakness. It has promised the American people to solve it. But it is becoming clearer every day that the task is beyond it. Not unlike Russia, it openly sought to destroy the Cuban Revolution. It played along with McCarthy until he was obviously unable to do the job that was wanted from him — discipline the working class. The supremacy America has held in the practical application of economic advances is now challenged and has received some decisive defeats. Most important of all, the whole society, not only the workers, is conscious that something is grieviously wrong. There is a frantic struggle for a sense of national purpose. So powerful

and all-pervading has been the bourgeois domination that, with all due respect paid to the lies copiously mixed with half-truth of the anti-Russian propaganda, the tradition of freedom is so strong that the American people genuinely turn with horror from Stalinism and its inheritance, only to see every day the American bourgeoisie striking blow after blow at liberty.

Large sections of the American population are horrified and revolted at the rapid degeneration of American society. The sense of crisis is national, and has attained such a scope that one cannot see how the American bourgeoisie will be able to handle it. Whatever form a solution or the beginning of an attempt at solution will take, it seems fairly obvious that for the first time the American working class will have to assume, will be forced to assume national responsibility, think its own independent thoughts, carry out its own independent actions.

Thus, although the working class has its own special problems, the state of the nation is pushing it towards some action. Any action that it may take involves at once the national solution of the national and international problems. But history warns us that a class, forced into independent action, will think its own thoughts and act to solve its own problems. It is to me certain that if the American working class should find itself, not necessarily at the very start, but rapidly enough, forced to intervene independently in the task of national regeneration, that one of the first things it will do is to reorganize the process of production. If it will act at all — and either it will act or the degeneration of American society (and world society) will continue — its main, perhaps its first action will be to reorganize its daily life, that is to say the labor process. This, I have to repeat, is not merely nationalization or more wages in less hours. It cannot mean another mobilization for continuous fighting with the capitalist class or with a class of bureaucrats or managers (capitalist bosses under a new name). It must mean a total reorganization of the labor process, with the working class in complete charge of production and its energies and experience devoted to making production a fully human occupation. America is the country of production, and more than any other will be able to understand and accept such a transformation. American workers, more than all others, accept production as a way of life. They know that it is production which has made the American nation what it is. They have the experience of production being boldly changed to suit the necessities of production. They will not fail to change production for the necessity of a human existence and national regeneration. No one else but they themselves can do it.

But there will be bitter opposition. And it is regrettable that those intellectuals and labor leaders who have been talking most loudly about the new society will be the most dangerous opposition. Most dangerous because from their previous interest in and sympathy with the working class, they are likely to gain positions and voices of leadership. The dyed-in-the-wool capitalist reaction will

recognize that for the time being they will have to accept other leadership and they will rally behind them, waiting for the time and the opportunity when these fail, as they are bound to fail, once more to take control.

This is the perspective. Without it you may do good work, but you weaken the first condition of success — the belief of the workers in themselves. The Marxist organization and above all the Marxist propaganda knows this. He knows that his great task is to work side by side with the workers on day-to-day problems, welcoming and in fact encouraging all possible allies. As a Marxist he is on guard always himself to avoid and to be in militant opposition to whoever and whatever will lessen the confidence of the working class in itself and in its own independent action. How exactly to do this is a difficult and at times apparently impossible problem. That is our daily burden, even if solved today, appearing in new forms tomorrow. But unless you know the problem and daily strengthen yourself in it, you will not only go wrong, but your best intentioned actions will do great harm to the very cause for which you are working.

Let me end with a historic weakness. As the crisis deepens numbers of the middle class and stray intellectuals become deeply perturbed and in their usual intemperate manner wish "to do something." They may even attempt some independent actions. In America their record of recognizing the power of the working class is very bad. Small Marxist organizations, hitherto confined to propaganda, may catch the fever, forget the special responsibilities which they have as Marxists and even find or indicate the solution of the ills of the day in the ideas and temper of these groups. Particularly they are inclined to do this if, as often happens, the w o r k i n g class, is w a t c h i n g and w e i g h i n g the situation, knowing the gravity of its problems and its own heavy responsibility. Here Lenin can be, as always, a model of policy. In 1905 when Russian capitalism received a d r e a d f u l blow from its defeat by the Japanese, Lenin warned that even reactionary classes might be moved to fight against Tsarism and the disasters it had brought upon the nation. He advocated support of these. But in 1905 as in 1917 friends observed that when the party was deep in action and excitement over the revolutionary upheavals, Lenin (though leading the concrete struggle) used every spare moment to reread the classics of Marx. The great Marxist, although the leader of a mass party, was holding tight to the fundamental principles. He knew how easy it was to slip away from them.

The working class did not disappoint him. In 1905 it initiated the first general strike in history. It created the Soviet. It was in his mastery of Marxism that Lenin was able to expect and recognize these creative achievements for what they were. These two articles are a study of theory, stimulated by the theoretical work of a gifted and devoted theorist of Socialism. May I, without offense, say that Mr. Williams can add enormously to his equipment and possibilities by mastering Marxism in its basic theories and the practice of its greatest exponents.

The Destruction of a Workers Paper

A Statement to the Editorial Board

15th January, 1962

The Secretary
The Resident Editorial Board

Will you please bring the following to the immediate attention of the REB?

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The minutes of the REB for December 10, 1961, contained the following:

"1. **Discussion Procedure.** Motion by Jim: to propose to JRJ that he consider his method of intervention and that if he wishes to intervene, which he has every right to do, that he intervene directly to the organization and not in the form of articles for the paper. Motivation: there is an internal discussion going on in the organization in which the organization has not determined the direction it is going to go or any change of direction if there is a change, and it is the responsibility of us to determine in the organization what are our political views to the public. We agreed that the discussion would not be in the paper.

"Discussion: Marty—JRJ's article is not an internal discussion article. It is a legitimate discussion of public questions which reflects the viewpoint of the organization. It should be published whether there is agreement or disagreement with it. Grace—J's letter of Nov. 7 in reference to the REB minutes of Oct. 29 makes clear that the article on Williams was written as an intervention in the discussion. The agreement on procedure was that discussion articles would not appear in the paper. The question is whether or not J is to be an exception to this agreement and I believe he should not be: For: G. and J.; Against: M. Motion carried."

This settled hostility to the principles of Marxism for 100 years marks the final stage in the destruction of our movement by the REB. Those who declare that the very fundamentals of Marxism are matters for discussion are no longer Marxists. I am unable to maintain any association whatever with people claiming to be Marxists and conducting themselves in that way. My experience has been that those who seek new and quick roads out of Marxism, while unwilling to declare their break with it, usually become the bitterest and most unscrupulous enemies of former comrades.

I therefore inform the REB that from henceforth I break all relations, political and personal, with all who subscribe to that resolution.

From the moment that I received the document in which the Editor of **Correspondence** announced the new discoveries in philosophy and theory, I was aware that the purpose for which the

organization was founded was now in grave, probably irreparable danger. I did my best to save it.

To Maintain Principles of Marxism

I am compelled to remind you that I am the founder of this organization which is now more than twenty years old. I founded it for the purpose of maintaining the principles and extending the knowledge of Marxism. Never at any time during those twenty years have I ever had any doubts as to the correctness and importance of the tasks and methods which we set ourselves in 1941. So convinced was I of this and so happy in the work that never at any time during the twenty years have I ever had the slightest doubt that the interests of the organization came first with me over all other interests, political and personal. I do not take any credit for this because I was never tempted to do otherwise. In this work I found the only way that I could live with energy, peace and satisfaction with the rest of the world, with my comrades, my family and myself. Among many mistakes was the fact that I never at any time placed before members and friends what was the historical significance of our organization in the struggle against the catastrophies of modern capitalism; and the demoralizing effect this would inevitably have on Marxists, particularly American Marxists, and on them particularly for reasons which have been recently explained. The importance of an organization like ours is calculable only by an understanding that nothing is more certain than that the working class will sooner or later be compelled to take the road we are travelling. I neglected also to give to the comrades a clear and confident exposition of the influence of the organization on the lives and character of the members and adherents. Its mere existence was a threat and menace to all the other renegades and dilletanti playing with Marxism. The present leadership has sunk into its present degradation because of its lack of understanding of the significance of a Marxist organization, whatever its size.

The same motives which prompted me to found the organization and remain devoted to it for twenty years now compel me to sever all connections with those who subscribe to that resolution which expresses the destruction of all we have stood for. I remain as I have always been, the unremitting enemy of all those who, calling themselves Marxists, believe that the building of socialism by the proletariat is a matter for discussion. I would expect that normally this information would be immediately conveyed to the membership. I no longer can depend on that from you and shall use the limited means and strength at my disposal to inform the membership of where I stand.

At this stage and in this letter there is only one matter which I think it necessary to bring to your attention. The strictly political issues are adequately dealt with in the article of Frank (October 8, 1961—**"Facing Reality—NOW"**) and in the letter of Marty to Freddy (Nov. 11, 1961). These two letters prove that the REB is impelled on its present course not by any backwardness or fatigue on the part of

the membership but by its own desire to seek new and short roads to popular recognition and influence, a historical delusion. I have only to remind you of the following.

In **Facing Reality** an international commission made it theoretically clear that for us the experiences, attitudes and opinions of every section of the proletariat and those classes nearest to it should be our constant and vital concern, if even these were opposed to the principles of Marxism to which we were devoted. The second half of that volume was devoted to a theoretical and practical exposition of the way in which a small body of Marxists should and could maintain contact with and so learn from what is always the main source of any advance in Marxist theory—the actions and ideas of the proletariat itself. That Marxism can make serious progress from any other source is a stupidity which is a commonplace for years in the Marxist movement. As is customary in the Marxist movement, the ideas contained in the book and the book itself were planned and written in close collaboration with all who were members or close associates of our movement. In preparation for the last convention similar collaboration produced a series of documents and proposals for submission to the membership. That is the way we have lived. That is the way we have progressed, for we have progressed. These are the latest major steps of our organization. Never at any time have we countenanced any suppression of any legitimate even if mistaken point of view, or any violent disruption or abandonment of what we believed to be the foundation of our movement. Even when such a blatant attempt was made not to examine politics and programs but to batter us by sheer force and brutality into a path in which the power of the proletariat became a matter for discussion, other members of the organization and I myself did not break with our methods. Continuing in the traditions of Marxism, I made known immediately my absolute rejection of this surprising new line (in reality as old as Marxism itself), but in the interests of the organization my main anxiety was to pay the fullest attention to conflicting points of view and not to allow them to break up the organization. This anxiety was most fully expressed in a letter to the Editor written on November 20th, 1961. At that time I was already convinced that the matter and the manner of her document represented a departure from Marxism and the Marxist tradition which I had experienced often enough before to recognize it for what it was. Nevertheless I thought it in the best interests of the great tradition of which we were one of the few representatives that I should suppress my personal convictions and make some effort to establish a procedure by which we would continue the work of twenty years (in my own case nearly thirty). In accordance with the best traditions of our movement I hoped that joint work, the great historical events which are taking place with ever redoubled force around us, and the role we could play in them, would result in time in a better understanding and increased strength for all of us.

That there would be difficulties was obvious to all, but devotion

to Marxism, good will, commonsense and above all a common belief that sooner or later the American proletariat would make clear the solution of our conflicts, all this impelled me to make one last effort to maintain the organization. I made it clear also that I intended to put aside all that I was doing and devote myself primarily to the organization which had declined chiefly owing to the inability of the leadership to combine Marxism with the problems of the day. I had watched this for a long time but had refrained from intervention because of my anxiety not to harm the authority of the leadership. I believed that the time had now arrived when my intervention would be welcomed by all. The following is the letter.

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Nov. 20, 1961

My dear Grace,

I want you to understand what I am thinking, for without your understanding and collaboration, the prospect is gloomy indeed.

I am convinced that our organization has dropped behind though there is only one procedure which can help it. I have begun once more to make Marxism the center of our thoughts. That is the main motive of my two articles. I believe further that our task for our own people above all, and at this time, is to do this without making Marxism a matter of quotations from Marx and Lenin, and a specialized branch of knowledge. I believe we have to deal with the intellectual currents of the day, but from a Marxist and popular American working - class basis. This means a hell of a lot of hard work. The idea of doing this without you, or worse still, against your determined opposition appals me. But in two weeks or so I hope to send an estimate of my personal prospects which will allow me to devote full time to the American organization, the paper and publications above all. It will mean as I shall show the break-up of all my previous plans. But the Marxist organization comes first, first and always first. Jimmy will of course be the leader of the organization and you the Editor. Nothing can change that, for to change that, or to feel that there is a necessity or need for such a change, is to misunderstand what has gone wrong and to misconceive the road out.

. . . . Your real burden is

(a) to be full time, not only to edit the paper, but to correspond with me on the things we have to work out, working with the others and making them write and learn to write.

(b) make the paper twice a month at all costs.

Marxist organizations have faced far greater crises than this and emerged stronger. By, if need be, handling your views with the organization and a leap forward always in mind, and goodwill, we can make it. This is to you personally although I don't mind whom you care to show it to.

Yours as always
(sgd) Jimmy.

To that letter I have had no response except this decision of the REB. I have therefore been compelled to make the only possible reply to the gross impertinence and shamelessness of the degradation of our movement.

In conclusion, for the sake of those comrades and friends who will undoubtedly be profoundly disturbed by this letter, I quote the following from the Selected Works of Lenin, Vol. IX, page 431.

Lenin on the Working Class

" . . . the dictatorship of the proletariat is not only violence against the exploiters, and not even mainly violence. The economic foundation of this revolutionary violence, the guarantee of its virility and its success is the fact that the proletariat represents and carries out a higher type of social organization of labor compared with capitalism. This is the essence. This is the source of strength and the guarantee of the inevitable and complete triumph of Communism.

"The serf organization of social labor rested on the discipline of the stick, while the toilers, who were robbed and tyrannized over by a handful of landlords, were extremely ignorant and downtrodden. The capitalist organization of social labor rested on the discipline of starvation, and, notwithstanding all the progress of bourgeois culture and bourgeois democracy, the vast masses of the toilers in the most advanced, civilized and democratic republics remained an ignorant and downtrodden mass of wage slaves, or oppressed peasants, robbed and tyrannized over by a handful of capitalists. The Communist organization of social labor, the first step towards which is Socialism, rests, and will do so more and more as time goes on, on the free and conscious discipline of the very toilers who have thrown off the yoke of the landlords and capitalists.

"This new discipline does not drop from heaven, nor is it born out of pious wishes; it grows out of the material conditions of large-scale capitalist production, and out of this alone. Without this it is impossible. And the vehicle, or the channel, of these material conditions is a definite historical class, created, organized, consolidated, trained, educated and hardened by large-scale capitalism. This class is the proletariat.

"If we translate the Latin, scientific, historical-philosophical term 'dictatorship of the proletariat' into simple language, it means the following.

"Only a definite class, namely, the urban and the industrial workers in general, is able to lead the whole mass of toilers and exploited in the struggle for the overthrow of the yoke of capital, in the process of this overthrow, in the struggle for holding and consolidating the victory, in the work of creating the new, Socialist, social system, and in the whole struggle for the complete abolition of classes."

In that conviction and all that flows from it I founded the organization. In that conviction I now break all connections with those for whom this becomes a matter for discussion. Wherever a shred of Marxism remained the two articles would have been joyfully

welcomed even by those who felt they had serious political differences with the organization. The casual manner in which they have been relegated to discussion shows what it is the new orientation wants to discuss. I will have no part of it.

With all those who still accept the foundations of Marxism and of our movement I continue to be not only a comrade (which, with all that it implies, counts first with me), hoping that nothing will ever make me depart from that comradely collaboration and personal sympathy with which I have always associated the practice of Marxism. I am not surprised that the brutality which always accompanies the departure from Marxism has struck this blow at our movement under such circumstances that every word I write is a blow at the recovery of my health and I am unable to assist those comrades who are so resolutely, unequivocally and calmly defending what we have inherited and what we have to contribute to the struggle for Marxism as the doctrine of international socialism. To them I say: the world around us is in social and spiritual torment precisely because of the abandonment of the idea that the proletariat is the only part of society which can give the impetus to the reorganization of society. Never has that truth been so amply demonstrated as in the Hungarian Revolution. To the realization of that truth humanity must come or perish. To all who adhere to that cause we are comrades, missing no opportunity to advance it. To those who do not know this but are drawn towards resistance to capitalism, we are friends. But to those who, having for years accepted it, are now determined to depart from it, we are enemies, outspoken and relentless. Even at this distance I am happy to note that the majority of the comrades utterly reject these presumably new discoveries or are deeply disturbed by them. Our greatest weakness so far has been the fact that membership in this organization has not been synonymous with a genuine, all-sided Marxist education, the development of individual capacities and the consequent expansion of theory and practice.

Decide for Yourselves

What you will do now is a matter for yourselves against what has proved itself incompetent, untrustworthy and unscrupulous leadership. What I have said here does not in any way affect your decision or plans to hold a convention. That is your affair. In all your difficulties, hold fast to the essentials both of ideas and of conduct. Be assured that all my energies and experience will be completely at your disposal far more than it has been in the years 1953-1961.

(signed) Yours faithfully,
J. R. Johnson

Postscript:

In the quotation from Lenin which appears in the body of this letter is the foundation of the Marxist movement. True in 1918, it is truer than ever today. That I am not prepared to make a matter of discussion with anybody except newcomers to our movement. But along with Marxist political principles there is the tradition of

Marxist conduct. To all those friends and comrades who are new to the political movement and who may think that the step I am taking is unduly severe, I attach the following letter. There you will see how anxious I was to avoid the complete break which I am now, on principle, forced to make. Read it, compare it with the REB discussion and resolution, and learn the personal and political degeneration with inevitably flows from a desertion of the principles of our movement.

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2 Nov. 61

My dear Jimmy,

Thanks for the documents and your prompt sending of them.

Thanks also for your long and very full letter. I shall do my best to take up all the points.

You say at the beginning that you take full responsibility for what has been done. I believe that a mistake has been made. What matters is to recognize that and to take the steps necessary to correct what I felt very strongly would be inevitably the evil consequences for the organization. I can tell you what I think should be done. You yourself, it seems, have gone a long way towards repairing the damage. I judge that from many things you say in your letter. Apology or excuse is now a subordinate matter. The thing is to make certain that the organization holds together and also learns something from the crisis.

First of all, you propose to make a serious analysis of the American development. Jimmy, nothing could be better and it is a thousand pities that that is not what was done at the beginning. You say, "I do not know whether my document is going to be accepted in the organization." I don't know exactly what you mean. But the document will have to be welcomed by the organization and it will be welcomed by me. We have needed such an analysis for a long time. In my opinion you can print it in the paper, stating that it is an independent view of the American development. There is nothing wrong with that. You invite discussion. That is a normal thing in a Marxist organization. And it often helps the paper and the organization when people see that you are discussing serious questions seriously.

I want to warn you about two things. The first is you say that "our positions in regard to workers' control of production, the Negro question, the Civil War," are disputed by people in the society to whom these questions are very fundamental and pertinent questions. That is not strange. If they were not disputed, it would mean that the people were all Marxists. The question is to state our views, in this case your views, clearly and to take into consideration the arguments that they have against them. In any case it would be extremely valuable, and that was dealt with in **F a c i n g Reality**, for the positions in dispute to be discussed in the paper. I am sure that not only you but all of us will be better for it.

The second point is more personal, although still political. When you do a thorough document of that kind, it is wise before you send

it out even to the organization to let one or two people in whom you have special confidence see it, me for instance. I will give you my views on it, quite often not so much on the ideas but on the presentation of them in regard to fundamental principles of Marxism. Then you decide whether you wish to modify, increase or in any way alter the statement of your views. But your own views you are always entitled to.

I do not quite understand your paragraph about analyzing "any particular individual." I have not the slightest doubt that any ideas you put forward will be based on experience and careful thought. What you may be referring to I don't know.

You say that everyone must have his say. That is the Marxist organization. I cannot follow what you mean when you say: "But in doing so, it is clearly understood that I have some ideas too."

Of course you have some ideas. I want to say in passing that I read Grace's account of your speech at the discussion. There were in it certain very fundamental and important ideas which I would like to see you develop.

You Have an Opportunity

If the organization has any doubts about your leadership, that is the mistake of the organization. You now have an opportunity to show that you can hold the organization together. You say again that the organization has been certain that at a certain point I would intervene. In one sense that is correct. If I see that fundamental premises of Marxism are being attacked in what I consider an irresponsible manner, then of course I would intervene. But, as I have explained to you. I know that the organization has a great respect for my opinions. And that is rightly so. But I have taken great care to make it quite clear that as far as I was concerned you were the leader of the organization. Furthermore, allow me to say that while what you call "a question of me versus you" would be a very serious question, it would only be serious if we came to a complete break as to what constitutes the foundations of Marxism. That I do not see at all. We can have serious differences of opinion but as far as I can see at present I do not see that. Allow me to say this. S pays a great deal of attention to whatever you write. She says, and I have good reason to believe her, that you in the plant no doubt have for some time been telling workers, "You all are just sitting down taking everything. It is time that you all did something." Not only is it inevitable that you do sometimes. But it is necessary for a practical leader to take these steps. But the question only becomes serious if an attitude to them in the plant becomes a basic Marxist position in the paper on a general scale.

Now about the responsibilities which you have to assume and which I understand very well, I assure you. The organization has to be made to understand that, while the political discussion must have full attention, the organization more than ever must hold itself together . . . .

They must be made to understand that some of the heavy re-

sponsibilities which lies on the two of you must be relieved, particularly at this time. The organization must make the effort and you have every right to call upon it.

You can make the letter I wrote to you public if you feel like it. That is OK with me. You decide.

You say that you have "to present a document to the organization, and having presented that document to the organization the organization has to make its decision."

I may be misinterpreting you, but I seem to see there a feeling that your document is going to face the organization with this decision: either you accept this or you reject it, and that means a parting of the ways.

As I say, I may be doing you an injustice but I do not believe that any document which you present, based upon your knowledge and analysis of the American situation and what we as an organization should say and do about it, will create any such dangerous crisis. That, however, we will see.

I was very much moved by your concern that the link between us is not just a question of politics but it is a personal relationship too. I have always seen it that way. I am still in great difficulty about doing anything for any length of time. But in the sense that I think you mean, we are making it. We have come here at the invitation of good and kind friends. Furthermore, the University had insured me as it seems they do everybody who travels for them, and for the time being we are holding together. That is why we have been able to send you that amount. If anything goes seriously wrong, my dear Jimmy, you and Grace will know at once.

The letter I sent to Grace* I do not want it released to the organization. Understand me carefully. I do not want it to be released. That is to say, I am not anxious that it should be. In fact I have just read it over and in view of your letter I think it should not be. I haven't heard from Grace and that I feel very much, I assure you. My first response to the early communications was that the organization was doomed and that G was lost. That, for me, was a very serious matter, far more serious than the case of Rae. I want to repeat that. This to me, both politically and personally, was a far more serious matter than the break with Weaver. But I want to tell you that first of all many things in your speech at the discussion and now not only the facts and proposals but the very tone of your letter to me have reassured me that the organization is not in the perilous position which I feared. I am still waiting anxiously to hear from G.

Yours, as always,

Jimmy.

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*Letter to Grace, Oct. 22, 1961.

Working Class Journalism

Extracts from Two Letters

I

FACING REALITY — NOW

October 8, 1961

Dear Friends,

. . . . What has happened to our politics? **Our central faith, the inherently revolutionary capacity of the American workers, is being abandoned.** A careful reading of the recent issues of **Correspondence** will show that we are skeptical of what once distinguished us from other radical groups. It is this skepticism which is poisoning us, which is being rejected by our readers, which we must root out or perish.

The most striking s o c i a l development in the U. S. today is without doubt the offensive of the Negroes. This struggle has its own validity. What the Negroes are achieving in the actual day-to-day life that they have led is significant. The changes that they are now producing in the nation, in the South, in the minds of the whites as well as in their own minds—all this has its own value, not to be set aside for distant utopias or theories.

But **Correspondence** fails its particular role when it fails to **link up** the revolutionary struggle of the Negroes with that of the working class. To stress only the race angle is to surrender the paper's treatment of the question either to the liberals, on the one hand, who see only the extension of Rights, or the Muslims, on the other hand, who see only the extension of Race.

The surrender to the liberal line was clearly marked with the June 3, 1961 (V. 5, No. 11) issue of the paper. This was the fantastic issue which declared in the headline: "The Second Civil War Has Begun In the United States of America." What was the Civil War about? "The issues of freedom and equality which the American people refused to resolve 100 years ago are now going to be settled . . . . " Note the emphasis on Rights. Who was going to make this change? The workers? No, "bodies of armed men." And who are these? ". . . the Negro community, calm, confident, and conscious . . ." and" . . . the white youth in the North, burning to go to the aid of the Freedom Riders . . . . " That's it. **Not a word about the working class.** Not a mumblin' word.

If the article had **not** declared that the actions of the Freedom Riders were initiating the Second Civil War, it might have been possible to leave out a consideration of the working class . . . . But how . . . is it possible that an issue so profound to the nation,

THE SECOND CIVIL WAR, which has always meant for us the socialist revolution, which, in turn, has always meant the mobilization of the working class in their own revolutionary organs—how is it possible NOT to make some reference to the working class?

The abandonment of the revolutionary proletarian line in this social crisis of the nation produces not only farce and tragedy in **Correspondence.** It produces irony. Something like 17 years ago we attacked a WP pamphlet called "Plenty for All." It was a vulgar Marxist equivalent for the Moslem Heaven: all the wonderful material things of life were promised, in semi-religious tone, for the working class—once it made the revolution. It was devoid of the working class as a revolutionary force. Now, many years later, we improve on it, in the Aug. 26, 1951 (V. 5, No. 16) issue, the headline reads: "U.S. Can Produce Plenty NOW—Where Do We Go From Here." Plenty for all has become plenty for now!

But this article, typical of the Trotskyites and all the vanguardists, first lists all the Hell features of modern life in the U.S., then berates the very millions who suffer from this Hell: "Why do these inhuman conditions still exist in these United States, the one country in the whole world which claims to be a classless society? These are the questions which the American people must now face openly, squarely, honestly. There is no longer any excuse for us to evade them."

We are to become naggers of the working class. And they, being profoundly sensitive to the condenscension of the oppressors, will not renew their subs, letting us shrivel and die the death we deserve.

• • •

That this return to vanguardism is bankrupt is finally revealed in the last issue of the paper, (V. 1, No. 18). The headline reads: "Strikes Over 10,000 Local Grievances Show Shortage of Rights in the U.S.A." That is putting the cart before the horse. If anything, the strikes show that thousands of workers are ready to fight for their "rights." In 1955 they first rebelled against the guaranteed annual wage contract talks by posing **their** concept of the struggle, the fight for local grievances. This has now become so powerful a part of their wants, that their pressure drives Reuther running from one mouse hole to another, obviously a lackey of capital.

If the workers are so insistent on their rights that they can destroy Reuther's effectiveness in dealing with the auto companies in the manner he conceives of it, if they are so insistent, what can they think of a paper like **Correspondence** which obviously thinks that they don't fully understand that they have a shortage of rights?

• • •

In conclusion: what is necessary if we are to re establish the health of the paper and the organization, is not plenty for all or plenty for now or preaching socialism. What is necessary is to face the fact that we have been abandoning our basic ideas and concepts under pressure of alien classes. **We** must face reality—NOW.

Frank

—30—

(2)

Nov. 11, 1961

Dear Freddy,

In my last letter I raised certain aspects of the "backwardness of the workers." You haven't commented on them. You ask about Jim's three articles in the New Society (there, it crops up again). First, a word in general. These views are not entirely new to Jim or to many workers. I have no objection to their appearing in the paper as what a worker thinks. But when they appear in the New Society that is another matter because they reject what the New Society means. And when it appears as a series and when, further, it is held up as a model, as Grace does in her document, that changes the picture completely. What does Jim say? First, that outside the U. S., socialism is looked on as a way to acquire material goods. False. We have said, and Jim himself saw that in the oil strike when he was in Trinidad, that material goods were incidental, that what people were fighting for **everywhere** was control of society, self-realization, new social relations. Second, that U.S. workers never had it so good—they have a sliding scale of socialism. False on two counts. American workers don't have it that good materially. Maybe it's only 25% or 30% instead of 1/3 of a nation that is ill-housed, ill-fed, etc. But it is no less than that. But more importantly, socialism is not the presence or absence of material plenty and to call high pay, etc., a sliding scale of socialism is to pervert all that socialism means. Or don't you remember the famous phrase from Marx: "be his payment high or low?"

Third, workers talk about particular things, they are not for socialism as such. This is straight out of the WP-SWP.* Workers are judged by their **consciousness,** that is, by the extent to which they approve the party line, in this case, "socialism." Isn't this identical with the criticism that the WP and SWP directed against us for our pie-in-the-sky revolutionism? We don't understand the workers, they are not really interested in politics and socialism. If the Cuban revolution has any lessons for the United States it is precisely in this. (We said it a long time ago.) American workers are not concerned with theory in the way that European workers are. They are immensely practical and empirical. They do what has to be done and, maybe, after a while, they will stop for a moment and look back and say, well, this seems to be socialism that we are building. That is what the Cubans did. Since when have we judged the working class by formal answers to the question, are you for or against socialism? That isn't Marxism, that is middle-class idealism. Fourth, a shortage of rights, not of goods. I have written about "rights" before. It is equivalent to immediate demands. It is no more true or less true than it was 10 or 20 years ago. We rejected it then. Why do we embrace it now? What workers are short of now, as they were then, is not rights, but **power**—that is, the right to decide everything. Fifth, a sharp line should be

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*WP-SWP refers to the Workers Party and Socialist Workers Party, Trotskyist groups.

drawn between those who are ready to stand up like men and crusade for these rights, etc. That is pure agitation, which might not be out of place at a union meeting or in the Militant, but has no place in the New Society column. Our view of differences in the working class has always been based on class and layers in the class, not on personal courage or altruism. Finally, the Crusade for Socialism is as near as the first man who is ready to stand up and join the struggle. Absolutely, completely and totally false. The "Crusade" for socialism (whatever that means) is **here** now, in the actual concrete struggles of millions of workers, not for some abstract socialism but for what they want and for the power they need to get it. The conception of a Crusade for Socialism is totally Utopian and middle class because it is (like Jim's three articles) totally divorced from production, from the role of the working class in society and from the **necessities** of the struggle.

You say the intellectuals, or some of them, are more and more looking for a way out and not looking down on workers. There is a much greater ferment among intellectuals today, true. It began with the Hungarian **proletarian** Revolution. Don't ever forget that. But ferment is one thing and the working class is another. **None** of these intellectuals, none, none, none, is coming closer to the working class. C. Wright Mills is the best of them by far. And he can't see the working class at all. All of them have their paritcular intuitions and strengths. But the workers? Where is one of them moving toward the workers without **Correspondence?**

What is at stake is the most fundamental conceptions of Marxism. Grace quotes Guevara on how Marxism is now part of the intellectual knowledge of man, just as Freud, Newton, etc., with great approval. Guevara is leading a nation. His remarks were perfectly valid, very fine, in fact. But we are a political organization, not a nation. We are not Freudians, Nowtonians, Einsteinians or anything else of that kind even though we are intensely interested in these questions. We are **Marxists,** not because it is in some general way embodied in all of culture but because for us it is a method of thought, a conception of society and an absolutely necessary weapon in the struggle for socialism. It is our life.

With sadness, but great affection,
Marty

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